

goose lake prairie

STATE PARK



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THE PARK

Goose Lake Prairie State Park, one of the last remnants of prairie left in Illinois, is in Grundy County about 25 miles southwest of Joliet and 2 miles south of the Illinois River. The original purchase of 240 acres of land was made by the state in 1969. Later additions have brought the total acreage to 2,357, of which 17 acres is water. Approximately 1,513 acres are dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve.

Goose Lake Prairie, as one of the largest preserves in the tall-grass prairie region of North America, is of national significance. Ecologists and other scientists from across the country visit the area to study its wildlife and vegetation.

HISTORY

Indian: Goose Lake Prairie at one time was the home of the buffalo, wolf, prairie chicken and otter. Hunting must have been good for the Indians who lived in the area. Early tribes of mound-building Indians dwelt near the area. When Morris was being built 19 mounds were uncovered there and more were found just south of the Illinois River. Later tribes of the Illini Confederation settled in the area, where they farmed and grew corn, squash and beans. The Potawatomi were the last tribe to be found near Goose Lake and were here when the first pioneers arrived. The tribes most famous chief, Shabbona, gained notoriety for coming to the aid of white settlers during the 1832 Black Hawk War. Despite his services, Shabbona's tribe was forced to move to a reservation in Kansas in 1836. Shabbona later returned to Illinois and is buried in the Evergreen Cemetery of Morris.

Settlers: Peter Lamsett, a Canadian trapper, hunted the Goose Lake Prairie area as late as 1820. William Hoge was the first permanent white settler in Grundy County. Some of the pioneer families who settled in the Goose Lake area included the Collins and Holdermans, who at one time or another owned much of the present state park. The land was put to the plow

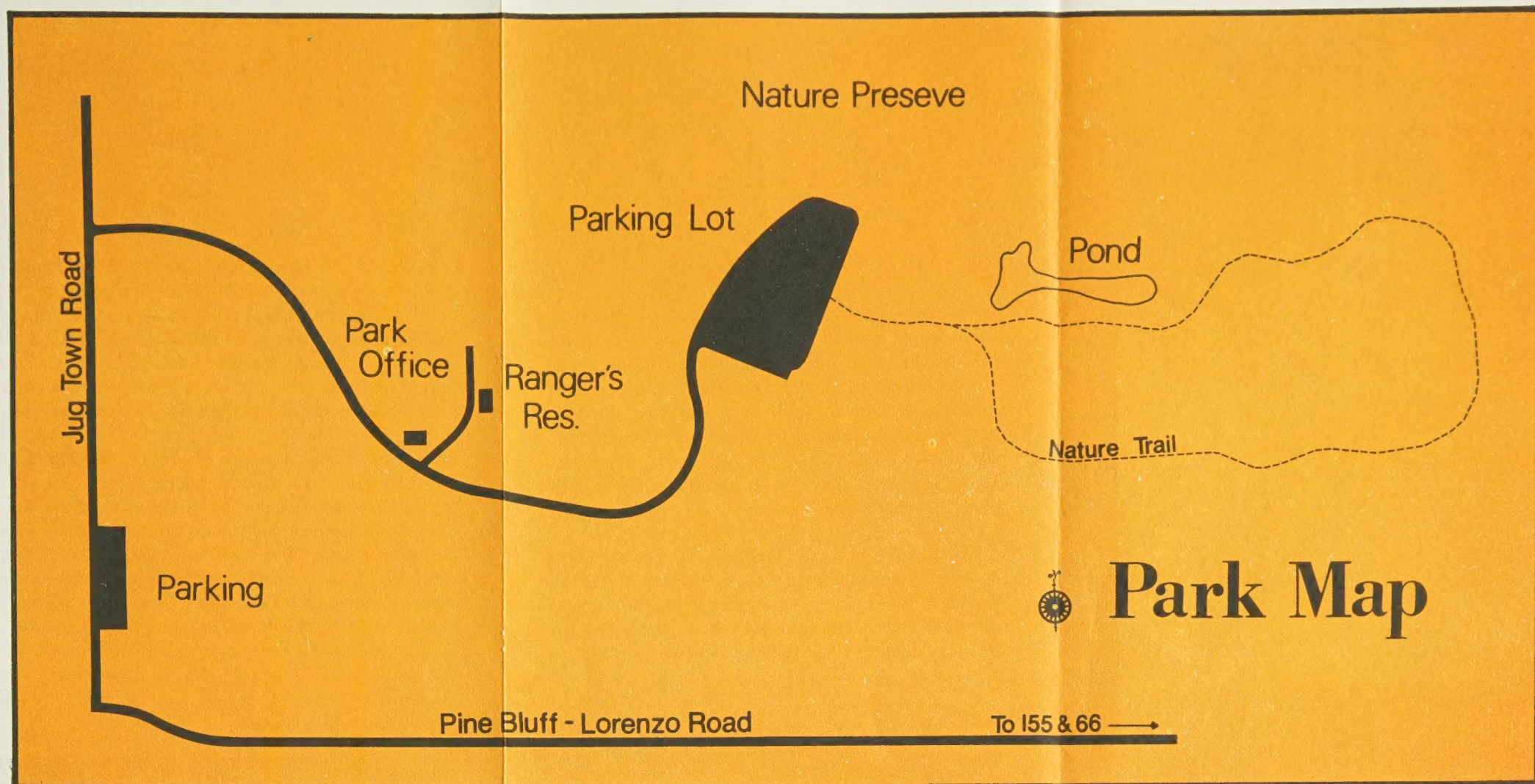
or grazed by cattle. William S. Miller, whose family also owned land now included in the park, described the Goose Lake area as almost treeless when he was growing up, but cattle grazing allowed hawthorn trees to invade the prairie. Pioneers found certain hardships waiting for them when they settled the Goose Lake area.

The park is also the site of a once thriving community called Jugtown. Started in 1853, the town once had 50 families who made drain tiles and pottery from clay mined on the western edge of Goose Lake. The town had pottery buildings, houses, two boarding houses, one school, a tavern, blacksmith's shop, general store and kilns. Most of the families were from New York but some were from Ireland and England. Transportation was difficult to and from the town, due to muddy roads, and Jugtown ceased to exist after only a few years.



THE NATURAL SCENE

Goose Lake Prairie is the last large remnant of prairie left in Illinois, the "Prairie State." As such, it is of historical, as well as natural importance. Illinois was once almost three-fourths covered by prairie; now these grasslands have been converted to croplands. This state today is very different from the frontier out of which pioneers struggled to make a living. Goose Lake Prairie is a reminder of the environment with which Illinois' Indians and white settlers had to contend, a place of grasses, wild flowers, fires and seemingly ceaseless prairie winds.



Prairies are composed of grasses and forbs (wildflowers) with trees and shrubs being present only as scattered individuals or clumps. The most important grasses at Goose Lake Prairie are big bluestem, Indian grass, switchgrass, prairie dropseed and little bluestem. Wildflowers include spring forms such as violet shooting star and blue-eyed grass. These give way in summer to false indigo and blazing star and in fall to sunflowers, asters and goldenrods.

Goose Lake Prairie is a haven for wildlife. Wild ducks and geese concentrate on the vast marshlands in spring and fall. Rare species such as Henslow's sparrow are common here. The plains pocket gopher inhabits the area as well as such larger mammals as deer and coyote.

Grundy County offers some fine fossil hunting. The Mazon Creek area is world famous for its abundance of fossils from the Pennsylvanian Period of 200 million years ago. For thirty million years, the Goose Lake area went through cycles of elevations and erosion; much of the time the area was a swamp grown up in tree like ferns and other ancient plants. As these plants died, they became covered with layers of mud, and after millions of years of pressure from overlying deposits, the plants' remains became coal. Shafts were dug and land stripped to mine coal just southwest of Goose Lake. The former strip mine area has since been reclaimed. Other evidence of Goose Lake Prairie's past geological

history includes the many huge boulders scattered in the fields. Farmers had to pull out these rocks and pile them on the edges of their croplands or else plowing was impossible. These boulders were not formed in Illinois, but further north, and brought down to this area by glaciers over 10,000 years ago.

FACILITIES

Hiking: There is one developed trail with adjacent parking facilities.

Interpretive Program: This program is designed to provide activities to the visitor and relate him to his environment and natural resources.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION . . .

Admittance will not be granted groups of 25 or more persons to any state park or conservation area unless permission from the park ranger has been secured to use the facilities. It is also required that groups of minors have adequate supervision and that at least one responsible adult accompany each group not exceeding 15 minors. All pets must be on a leash.

Numerous state parks and memorials are within easy access of every part of the state. Lodges, cabins and dining rooms are important features of Illinois Beach, Starved Rock, Pere Marquette,

White Pines Forest and Giant City. Reservations for lodging should be made with lodge managers.

All state parks are open the year round. When weather conditions necessitate the closing of park roads during freezing and thawing periods, access to park facilities is by foot only.

For more details about this site, contact Ranger, R.F.D. 1, Morris, 60450, phone 815/942-2899. For information on other Illinois sites, write to the Department of Conservation, Information/Education Section, State Office Building, Springfield, 62706.

